

Social Communication and Autism

Spotlight on: Infants



COMMUNICATION
ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Better Hearing & Speech Month

Babies crave—and make—social connections very early in life. Closely examining their mother’s face, smiling at daddy, and delighting in an older sibling playing peek-a-boo—these are all examples of social communication that is expected in baby’s first year.

First Year Social Milestones: By 12 months, babies should:

- Look and smile at people
- Respond to their own name
- Reach to be picked up
- Enjoy being around other people
- Make sounds or gestures to get attention
- Play simple back-and-forth games, like peek-a-boo

Encouraging Social Skills: Parents can help their baby develop social skills by:

- Responding to their babies’ cries, sounds, gestures, and other attempts to communicate
- Talking to their babies about what they are doing, such as bathing or feeding
- Teaching conversation by talking, pausing to wait for a reaction, and talking again—taking turns
- Reading books every day, using lots of expression
- Singing songs and reciting nursery rhymes

Something “Off”: Parents know their child best. Sometimes, they feel that something isn’t right. Maybe it is that their baby doesn’t cry—or doesn’t seem to notice when the parent talks or tries to play with them. These may be signs of a potential social communication problem—or autism spectrum disorder.

What Is a Social Communication Disorder? A child with a social communication disorder has problems using verbal and nonverbal language to interact with others. Babies display social language use long before they speak their first word. Social communication includes taking an interest in and looking at other people; reaching, waving, and using other gestures; using gestures and sounds to convey different needs; and babbling and imitating a parent’s sounds or actions.

What Is Autism? Social communication problems are one of two hallmarks of autism. All children with autism have problems with social communication. Children with autism also show restricted, repetitive behaviors such as flapping their arms, rocking, or saying the same sounds over and over again. Children can have a social communication disorder without having autism. They don’t exhibit the restricted, repetitive behaviors.

It is never too early to raise concerns about your child’s social communication skills. Talk to your pediatrician—and seek an evaluation from a speech-language pathologist. By treating any potential disorder early, your child can develop the early skills that are the building blocks for future communication, social, academic, and life success.



Speech-language pathologists can help!

Learn more at www.asha.org/public.



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